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AUTHOR Foley, Terrence; And Others
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ABSTRACT

In an effort to prepare for a North Central Association accreditation visit, Henry Ford Community College (HFCC), in Michigan, developed and implemented a decentralized and faculty-driven assessment plan. First, a faculty member was assigned to begin the groundwork for the assessment plan and an Instructional Assessment Committee was formed to coordinate assessment efforts. An assessment model was also adopted that contained a specific accountability structure emphasizing long-term assessment efforts. The decentralized assessment process at HFCC focuses on compliance and instructional improvement. While an instructional assessment operation serves as a liaison and provides services and support to individual assessment teams, decentralization ultimately means that programs and departments are responsible for securing the necessary resources for their plans. Immediate assessment efforts at HFCC will concentrate on the question of general education assessment. Another area that will require concerted effort and attention in the very near future is the collection of external data from students who have left the institution, from employers of program graduates, and from four-year institutions that accept transfer students from HFCC. A chart showing assessment goals, outcomes, and criteria for an associate degree in Interior Design and a certificate in Food Service Management is appended. (TGI)

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Decentralization and Faculty Ownership: Keys to a Successful Assessment Strategy

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Terrence Foley, Walter Mackey and Jo-Ann Terry
Henry Ford Community College
5101 Evergreen Avenue
Dearborn, MI 48128

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Decentralization and Faculty Ownership: Keys to a Successful Assessment Strategy

Terrence Foley
Walter Mackey
Jo-Ann Terry

Henry Ford Community College is a large, comprehensive community college located near the city of Detroit. Its student population is significantly multiethnic and multiracial and includes a large number of students who do not speak English as their primary language. The city of Dearborn, where Henry Ford is located, possesses the largest Arabic speaking population in the United States.

Faculty Ownership of Instructional Assessment

Henry Ford Community College is proud of its history of shared governance; the faculty at this institution plays a significant role in shaping decisions that influence the direction that the college will take as it reassesses its mission of teaching and learning. It is in this light that instructional assessment was conceived at Henry Ford. Any attempt to impose a top-down assessment plan would be doomed to failure from the onset. The administration at Henry Ford Community College wisely placed the development and implementation of assessment into the hands of faculty immediately after initial preparations for the Spring 1995 NCA visitation were begun.

The institution has never had an Office of Institutional Research which is common to other large community colleges. Therefore, initial structures and responsibilities for assessment had to be developed from the ground up. The administration made the necessary financial and personnel commitment so that a faculty-driven model could succeed. In January 1993, a faculty member was released from all teaching responsibilities in order to begin the groundwork for the development of an assessment plan. This individual, Dr. Walter Mackey from the Mathematics Division, had experience and training in evaluation and measurement strategies and had served as a consultant to local school districts in their attempt to implement outcomes assessment.

His first three months were spent in numerous small group meetings with faculty members at the department level. As is the case with many institutions, the faculty at HFCC were largely unaware of the current assessment mandates. They taught their classes and were professional in keeping abreast of new developments in their areas of expertise, but assessment and related educational issues were not part of their thinking.

Eleven representatives from the college attended the March 1993 NCA annual meeting in Chicago and used this time away from campus to organize and plan for the direction of assessment at HFCC. These representatives were members of the embryonic Instructional Assessment Committee that was to play a major role in the coordination of assessment efforts at the college.

The make up of this committee was mostly faculty, so that assessment requirements and requests would be viewed by faculty as coming from faculty.

The committee, which is still in existence, has co-chairs: an instructional Vice-President and a faculty member. The faculty co-chair, Mr. Terry Foley, is the Director of the Learning Lab. This is a faculty position at HFCC, and in his role as Director, Mr. Foley had been involved in using instructional assessment information for years. His being the chair of the faculty strike committee also gave him more credibility that was extremely helpful in dealing with certain groups that were less than enthusiastic about having to assess their program's effectiveness. The position of Faculty Co-chair is given three-quarters released time from teaching responsibilities.

The composition of the Instructional Assessment Committee was designed so that most of the areas on campus that would have to be involved in a successful assessment operation were represented in some form. Members include the directors of counseling, computer operations, the placement office, developmental education, and registration. All major career and academic areas of the college have representation.

The Fall 1993 semester was spent writing the HFCC Instructional Assessment Plan and meeting with individual program faculties as they developed their specific assessment plans. A program was defined as "a structured series of courses leading to either a degree or a certificate." It soon became clear that some standardization would have to be imposed on local assessment plans or there would be chaos across campus. As a result, the Instructional Assessment Committee instructed all sixty-five programs across the college to report their assessment intentions in a common Goal-Outcome-Criteria flowchart format. Two examples of flowcharts are included at the end of this article. Sample flowcharts were prepared using non-existent programs as examples, and literally hundreds of small meetings were conducted between local program assessment committees and the two teachers released to assist in this development process. Divisions of the college such as English and Mathematics that do not offer degrees or certificates were officially exempt from the program assessment model. These areas of the college, however, were actively involved in significant course-level assessment activities and will be included in the HFCC assessment model for General Education when it is completed in approximately one year.

The Henry Ford Community College Instructional Assessment Plan went through a total of fifteen revisions before it was finally adopted at a meeting of the entire College Organization a year later in September 1994. This model contains a specific accountability structure so that there is subtle pressure on program areas to view assessment as more than a once-in-ten-year activity to placate NCA in its accreditation process. Although most programs have been cooperative in the assessment efforts, there are some areas which view assessment as a minor irritation that will go away if ignored long enough. As a result, a reporting structure was included in the HFCC Instructional Assessment Plan to encourage all areas of the institution to cooperate in this venture. Each October 1st, all program directors and lead teachers must submit a detailed Annual Assessment Report to the appropriate Instructional Vice-President and to the Instructional Assessment Committee. These reports are reviewed at both levels and an annual State of Assessment Report is made by the faculty co-chair of the Instructional Assessment Committee to the entire College Organization at its January meeting.

Decentralization of Instructional Assessment Operations

Assessment has two purposes: compliance and instructional improvement. These two objectives may not necessarily be mutually exclusive, but it is clear that an assessment strategy that is dictated by compliance alone will generate a different faculty response than one that is established to help teachers improve instruction. Henry Ford Community College, in establishing the structures for generating assessment information, maintains two separate institutional bodies: one, administratively operated, that responds to state and federal mandates for information, and the other, the instructional assessment operation, the main purpose of which is to provide the teaching faculty with information that will help improve the teaching and learning process at HFCC. The compliance side of the coin is under the direction of the Coordinator of Institutional Development and Systems.

The other side of the coin is the faculty-driven instructional assessment area. Assessment at Henry Ford is decentralized in the sense that assessment activities are the responsibility of the people most closely associated with the students in the program, namely the faculty at the program or classroom level. The instructional assessment operation simply provides the programs, divisions, and departments with services such as data requests, scanning facilities, consultation, development of specialized databases, questionnaire construction, and assistance in test development. These operations will eventually be housed in a new Center for Assessment and Instructional Innovation that is scheduled to open in approximately two years and is temporarily housed in a makeshift trailer. The assessment portion, the "A" part of the CAII, currently is composed of four individuals:

1) the faculty co-chair of the Instructional Assessment Committee (3/4 released time) whose primary role is the administration of the daily operations of instructional assessment,
2) the Technical Assessment Coordinator (3 credit hour extracontractual assignment) who supervises the Faculty Technical Liaison(s), assists the Computer Technician in data production, and produces statistical analyses that are non-routine in nature,
3) the Faculty Technical Liaison (1/2 released time) who prepares reports for individual faculty assessment requests, helps develop specialized databases for storing information at the program and department level, and meets with small faculty groups in helping to plan assessment activities, and
4) the Computer Technician Specialist (full-time position, non-faculty) who downloads data from the mainframe system, performs scanning operations, and generates statistical reports that are of a relatively simple nature.

When completely established, the assessment operation will have a full-time secretary. Long-range plans also call for funds to provide additional Assistant Faculty Technical Liaisons who will be given one released class to provide specific ad-hoc services when necessary.

The assessment team in the CAII serves as the intermediary to other areas on campus which provide services essential for local assessment efforts. Production of information external to the

campus, namely questionnaires from students after they are no longer attending HFCC, employer information, and data from four-year institutions, is the ultimate responsibility of the Coordinator of Development and Institutional Systems. The instructional assessment team serves as the liaison between this office and those programs which require external data for assessment efforts.

While the instructional assessment operation provides services and support to individual assessment teams, decentralization ultimately means that programs and departments are responsible for securing whatever resources are needed for their plans. If data entry is needed and this data cannot be scanned, then each program or department must provide data entry personnel out of their own budget. The assessment team will set up a data entry program and provide training but will not be responsible for actual data entry. The latter has been a major problem for areas that have opted for standardized non-scannable final exams that must be maintained in a database for future analyses. If specific assessment plans require that employers be contacted, there is no currently operable centralized mechanism for providing this information. At least for the present, this is a program or department responsibility.

It is clear that a faculty-driven, decentralized model comes with a price, and that price may be a little less efficiency than might be present in a highly-structured, administratively-driven model. But the faculty at Henry Ford Community College feels it is a price worth paying. Assessment is theirs, and the faculty believes that improving teaching and learning in the classroom is the essential goal of instructional assessment. Intentional separation of institutional assessment and instructional assessment may be more costly, but an instructional assessment operation that is going to be taken seriously by faculty must be customized to the particular needs of the sixty-five programs on campus. A standardized report for Automotive Service may not be applicable to the needs of the faculty in a pre-engineering curriculum.

The Future for the Assessment Effort

The key players in the instructional assessment effort, the faculty on reassigned time, have been extremely busy over the last three years. But it has been a very profitable three years. Henry Ford Community College has been transformed from an institution in which structured assessment was found only in isolated areas to one in which all programs are required to report annually their assessment activities and results.

The immediate assessment efforts at Henry Ford Community College will concentrate on the question of general education assessment. As mentioned earlier, each program must structure its assessment plan in a Goal-Outcome-Criteria format. Every plan will have another goal, that of a yet-to-be-determined General Education statement that will be common to all degree programs. The immediate task is to determine student outcomes that will cross all program lines. This is a difficult task for any institution. But an institution whose faculty views assessment as its responsibility should be able to reach agreement on this issue. Had the development of the assessment structure at this college not been a faculty-driven one from its inception, then campus-wide consensus on general education outcomes would be far less likely.

Another area that will require concerted effort and attention in the very near future is that of external data. Many of the sixty-five programs at Henry Ford have developed assessment models that require data from students after they have left the institution, from employers of program graduates, or from four-year institutions that accept HFCC transferees.

Instructional Assessment is not a smoothly running operation without problems or failures; it is a process in an embryonic stage that has a potential, if properly nourished, for having a significant impact upon the institution and its students. The optimism that permeates the process results from the fact that full-time teaching faculty believe that instructional assessment is their operation and its results are being used, not to punish or compare different areas of the college, but to give faculty specific information that will enable them to do a better job in teaching students. At an institution like Henry Ford Community College, an assessment plan that was not decentralized and faculty-driven would be an assessment plan that would have had minimal long-range impact on daily classroom activity.

Appendix A.

Assessment Goals, Outcomes, and Criteria

Associate in Arts Degree–Interior Design

Program Goal	Student Outcomes	Assessment Criteria
The goal of the Associate in Arts Degree - Interior Design is to give program graduates the basic skills in Interior Design that will prepare them for transfer to four-year programs if desired, or possible entry-level positions in the field of Interior Design. To achieve the above stated mission, we introduce and explore the following concepts and skills. Our goals is to build on the students' understanding of these concepts and skills in each art laboratory class they take in our program.	Students will be able to demonstrate a functional knowledge of basic interior design skills.	75% of all program graduates will have a satisfactory instructor rating on an exit portfolio review.
	Students will possess a functional verbal and visual vocabulary about interior design concepts.	75% of the program graduates will demonstrate successful mastery of 75% of the significant visual and verbal vocabulary in Interior Design, as measured by faculty observation at the time of the portfolio review.
	Students who desire to transfer will have the skills to pursue a four-year degree in Interior Design.	After transferring to a four-year institution, HFCC Interior Design students will succeed at a rate comparable to students who took all their training at the four-year school. (Until records are made available from transfer institutions, HFCC will collect data through a college-wide graduate survey.)
	Graduates will possess the knowledge and skills necessary for an entry-level position in Interior Design.	75% of program graduates will be rated as having the competency to attain an entry-level position in the field of Interior Design (by a professional in the field, e.g., member(s) of the Interior Design Advisory Committee or potential employer).

Certificate of Achievement Program–Food Service Management

Program Goal	Student Outcomes	Assessment Criteria
The Certificate of Achievement Program - Food Service Management is designed to give graduates a concentrated approach to the technical knowledge and skills required for entry-level employment in the hospitality industry.	The student will demonstrate the mastery of the essential skills in food service operations.	100% of all certificate graduates will demonstrate mastery of food service operations by receiving a score of at least 75% by the National Restaurant Association in the Introduction to Hospitality National Test.
	Students will demonstrate the mastery of essential knowledge in sanitation.	100% of the graduates will demonstrate competencies on basic sanitation by successfully passing the National Restaurant Association (NIFI) Test with a score of 75% or higher. 100% of the graduates will demonstrate competencies in sanitation by successfully completing the Michigan Department of Public Health Food Management Certification Test with a score of at least 75%.
	The students will demonstrate a mastery of the essential knowledge of nutrition.	100% of the graduates will demonstrate competencies on basic nutrition by successfully passing the National Restaurant Association Test with a score of 75% or higher.
	Graduates will be readily employed in the Hospitality Industry.	Within six months after graduation, 65% of the certificate graduates will be employed in appropriate positions in the hospitality field.